

Senator Harkin: Advocate for Strengthening Programs & Services for Seniors

“Social Security insurance has served us well. It will serve these young people here today well. It will serve all young Americans well as long as we think about it in terms of the American family. We are all in this together. We will all go our separate ways and do our separate things in life, but if trouble falls, if one person becomes disabled, if one person dies and the widow or widower and the kids need help, we are there. We are there as part of a family.”

— *Senator Tom Harkin, on the Senate Floor January 31, 2005*

In the past two sessions of Congress, Senator Tom Harkin has introduced legislation that would increase benefits for lower and middle income retirees, employ a more accurate cost of living increase for seniors, and fund the Medicare trust fund shortfall by increasing the income subject to Social Security withholding. As Chairman of the HELP Committee during the negotiation and passage of the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA), Harkin championed reforms that are transforming Medicare from a “sick care” system to a true “health care” system. Harkin has been the lead voice in the movement to improve the private retirement system. He has championed efforts to promote defined benefit pension plans and recently put forth a proposal to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to earn a retirement benefit they cannot outlive. **Among the highlights of Harkin’s work to preserve and protect important programs seniors:**

Preserving and strengthening Social Security:

- Authored the [Strengthening Social Security Act of 2013](#), a measure that will increase benefits for current and future Social Security beneficiaries while making it stronger for future generations by extending the life of the Trust Fund through 2049.
- Championed the fight against Social Security privatization in the late 1990’s, 2002, and 2005.

Implementing policies to bolster and streamline Medicare:

- Included provisions in the ACA to ensure that seniors on both private insurance and Medicare have access to life-saving preventive treatments with no charge. In 2014, over 37.2 million seniors have received a free preventive health service through Medicare.
- In Iowa, Medicare beneficiaries have saved more than \$120 million on vital prescription drugs because of the ACA.
- Directed the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that identified \$23 billion in annual program losses. In reaction, Harkin successfully pressed the Medicare agency to use competitive bidding to purchase medical equipment.
- Founded the Medicare Senior Waste Patrol in 1997.

Championing retirement savings plans for current and future generations:

- Introduced the [Universal, Secure, and Adaptable \(USA\) Retirement Act](#) to provide workers with a savings account that they cannot outlive, tackle the growing retirement crisis, and rebuild the private pension system.
- Enacted legislation to create a new “Participant and Plan Sponsor Advocate” at the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation to give workers and retirees a voice when their pensions are in jeopardy.
- Led efforts in the Senate and worked with the Obama Administration to promulgate regulations that protect working people by helping both employers and employees better understand the fees they were being charged in their 401(k) plans.

Protecting older workers:

- Helped to introduce the [Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act](#), a bipartisan effort to restore fundamental fairness in the workplace. The legislation revives vital civil rights protections for older workers that were limited following the Supreme Court’s decision in *Gross v. FBL Financial*. It makes clear that the “motivating factor” framework applies as well to the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, the *Rehabilitation Act* and retaliation claims involving race, sex, national origin and religion – thus treating these forms of discrimination and retaliation equally.

For more information, please visit Senator Harkin’s website at <http://harkin.senate.gov/>, or follow him on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/tomharkin> or Twitter <https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin>.